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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003916

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN YOUTH UNCONVINCED ABOUT THE WAR ON  
TERRORISM; FEARFUL THAT THEY COULD BE ITS NEXT TARGET

Ref: Amman 3330

1. The following cable is a report prepared by a foreign service national and based on extensive contacts in the student community.

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Summary  
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2. Through the eyes of most Jordanian young adults, America's war on terrorism is a war on Islam and the Arabs. America's support for Israeli "oppression" of Palestinians - which they see as getting worse, not better since September 11 -- is the main reason for this belief. A 20-year-old male sums it up: "Palestinians have suffered brutal oppression for the past 50 years under the Israelis. It is with American support and with American weaponry that Israel is able to do so." There is little popular support for current US foreign policy among Jordan's youth. This was evident when students burned American flags alongside the Israeli flag during the April demonstrations in a show of angry protest at America's "biased war."

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Silenced politicized majority  
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3. POLFSN spoke recently with several dozen Jordanian students. Despite a broad sense of apathy and helplessness, these young adults were highly opinionated and politicized. Almost every youth interviewed talked about his/her inability to do anything about the "situation". Beyond calling for the destruction of Israel, burning flags, and boycotting American/Israeli goods, Jordanians feel powerless in the face of a campaign of such magnitude (i.e. the war on terrorism). "We are forbidden to talk politics, we are weak, we can't allow political movements, demonstrations....". The war on terrorism has highlighted their frustration with their own government as demonstrations and public speeches have been curtailed during moments of tension.

4. There is a widespread perception among young adults that the Security Services are all too often willing to circumscribe freedom of expression in their effort to ensure stability. A Professor at the University of Jordan claims that students are "forbidden to talk or discuss terrorism because that would mean talking about Islamism and fundamentalism. Public talks are forbidden to delve into these themes - rather, they must speak in general, and not mention names, organizations, or the USA." They talk in symbols or in the privacy of their own homes, with people or professors they trust. When the Professor asks his students political questions in class, the answers are usually muted. "There is heavy GID presence in the classrooms and so students are afraid to voice their opinion, but they come to me in private, and they grasp ideas and they are vocal about their anger at American foreign policy."

5. One common denominator in the feelings of young adults in Jordan is their opposition to America's war on terrorism. "It's not a fair war, they (USG) are taking sides, they are trying to be judges of the world, they give themselves the right to decide who is a terrorist and who is not - and it's not that simple", said one young adult. While many still do not believe for certain that Bin Laden was responsible for September 11, the majority is convinced of one thing: America is biased and America doesn't like the Muslim Arab world. This belief is entrenched, dangerously so, in the minds of many. When asked about what message they would like to send to the USG, the responses strike the same chord: "no one likes terrorism, but think before you act against people - and stop using September 11th in misguided ways." There is a perception that anyone who has an Arab name, and has a beard is automatically suspect.

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Just how entrenched?  
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6. The following incident is worth mentioning as it sheds light on Anti-American (foreign policy) sentiment in youth circles. In mid-May, 5 professors were expelled from the

Shariaa (religious) school of the University of Jordan (Reftel). Students with whom we spoke blame the USG for this outcome. Their rational is this: All the professors were graduates from Saudi Arabia, they were all appointed by the Jordanian government, never talked badly about Jordan or the King, and never received illegal foreign funding. "What could be the reason behind their expulsion if it weren't for America's campaign and crackdown on fundamentalism?" They conclude that because the professors were Saudi graduates, then the names of the professors must have come from America to the Jordanian government, and that is the reason behind their expulsion.

17. Following the expulsion of the Professors, the University took harsh disciplinary action against three students - all from the Islamic movement in the University. Many students are fearful that the University may impose additional measures; student sources say that there possibly are twenty facing similar disciplinary action. Two strikes were held in mid June, prompting the head of the Islamic Action Front to send a letter to the Prime Minister with regard to the perceived crackdown on students with an Islamic background.

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Education not Punishment  
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18. A University of Jordan Professor of Sociology offered the following analysis and advice on how best to address the psycho-sociological reality of Jordan's youth: "Terrorism and violence are rooted in people's lives, understandings, and desperation. The war on terrorism should be geared to education. It is important to uproot the causes of violence, but if you want to fight the fighter, you will generate more strife." He advocated a more tolerant view to "dry the sources of discrimination and instead create more dialogue". Although the Professor did not see this as a war on Islam and the Arabs, he believes that many students view it as such because it is Arab Muslim countries that the US appears to be targeting.

19. Comment: The main concern among many young Jordanians is that the tactics America is employing in its war on terrorism will, in the long run, only serve to intensify Arab feelings of being identified as the enemy - and that this is already having repercussions in the Middle East. Such a dynamic - many educated Jordanians note ironically - will only act to undermine support for the U.S. in Arab and Muslim countries -- support that is necessary for the US's war on terrorism to succeed.  
Gnehm